

# STRANGER THINGS



## What If?

## ST One-Shot #1 - What if El came back to Mike on the night of Halloween? by [inktopia](#)

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**Summary:**

Mike had waited for Eleven inside the empty tent as days became shorter and shadows began engulfing his world, but he kept believing, hoping and dreaming about the impossible, crushed by the burden of unkept promises, slowly disappearing into an endless void. Then on the night of Halloween, something unimaginable happened.

**ST One-Shot #1 - What if El came back to Mike on the  
night of Halloween?**



## **WhatIf #1**

### **What if Eleven escaped from the cabin on the night of Halloween?**

It was the night of Halloween in the spooky town of Hawkins, Indiana. Somewhere in a cabin hidden in the woods, a girl named Eleven was sprawling on a couch and munching on an Eggo while watching the TV. It was her favorite pastime, but tonight there was a problem; the waffle tasted like cardboard, and the flick made absolutely no sense. She couldn't figure out what was missing, so with mundane curiosity, she kept switching the channels. She turned the dial twice but froze as the screen caught her attention.

Behind the transparent display of the motionless box, a young boy and a girl were walking side by side through the street in a quest to find something. They were dressed like monsters from some obscure comic book and carried baskets in their hands. Eleven recalled what Mike had told her about Halloween a few days back.

On that fateful evening, Eleven wrapped a blindfold around her eyes and transported her soul to Mike's basement. Then she gently sat down in front of the excited boy who was about to tell her about his adventures. Like every day, Mike started the conversation with plenty of excitement, "El? There's this festival that's taking place the day after tomorrow..."

Eleven was listening with rapt attention, but at the same time, she was intently staring at Mike's face. It was one of her favorite hobbies; to observe Mike to her heart's content. She couldn't speak to him, but she could memorize every small detail about his persona, and that enabled her to notice the sudden shift in Mike's tone that night.

Mike sighed and spoke, "I wanted to take you to trick or treating with me. You never had so much fun in your..."

Over the past few months, he had made many appeals to Eleven which had gone unanswered. Though it shattered her heart every time Mike had pleaded her to render a sign or come to school with him, she was not able to fulfill their desires. The agents were still investigating them. But that night, she nearly lost control as Mike made his heartfelt request to the void, "...can you come meet me on Halloween night? I'll dress up as a ghostbuster. Maybe... you can come... I won't tell anybody, just you and me."

Eleven couldn't respond, she kept sobbing as Mike uttered his closing words, "I'll wait for you. Forever. El!"

The very next day, Eleven stopped Hopper as he was leaving and spoke urgently, "Can you bring a comic book?"

"When did you become interested in comics?"

Eleven had framed her answers carefully. She spoke coolly, "TV!"

She kept her answer short and simple because she didn't like lying to her friends. But this was an emergency, and after all, she was telling the truth in a particular fashion. She figured it was alright.

"I'll get you something."

"Ghost... Busters...!"

Hopper wasn't surprised because he had seen the trailer of the movie a few days back with his daughter. It was undoubtedly an entertaining flick, but how did she know that there was a comic?

Hopper nodded slowly, "I'll see what I can do."

Eleven shook her head and replied, "Ghost... busters...!!"

Hopper groaned and walked towards his van.

That night, Hopper handed her a roll of paper and sighed, "I'm sorry. I couldn't get a comic. I got a post..."

He couldn't finish his apology. Eleven beamed like the sun and hugged him tightly. In return, Hopper smiled and ran his hand through her fluffy hair. It often amazed him that how little it took to satisfy his daughter, except for that damn Wheeler kid. Eleven would not accept even the moon in his place. Then she let go and ran into her room with the poster and didn't come out until dinner time.

Being completely detached from the outside world, Eleven had to struggle to decide how to visit Mike on Halloween. But she finally made her mind up before going to bed. From the trailer and the poster, she had realized that the Ghostbusters were a group of people who captured evil ghosts. Mike was going to the Halloween costumed as a ghostbuster. The other three members of the party would definitely be donning similar outfits. But the Ghostbusters gang had only four members. So, what would Eleven dress like? She got the answer a minute later as her eyes fell on the corner of the poster.

*'Slimer! I would go as ghost. Mike will know who I am.'* She grinned as the thought nested in her mind before she went to bed. However, the next day, Hopper dumped a lake full of water on that raging fire and gave strict instructions to Eleven to not leave the cabin. He was paranoid about safety and Halloween was full of unnecessary distractions that they could not afford.

So, here Eleven was, watching TV with complete disinterest and wanting to visit Mike like anything. But then that strange movie started playing that drew her interest like a magnet. There was something special about the young couple who were walking by themselves, hand in hand through the quietest suburbs of the town. Suddenly, the street lights started flickering. In an instant, Eleven leaned forward and focused on the screen with complete attention.

The duo crossed the street and entered the pathway leading to a battered house that screamed danger at sight. There were sure to be monsters hiding in that home. Eleven urged the couple to run away, but her voice couldn't penetrate the glass that separated the two realities. Oh, Eleven wasn't afraid of horror films, she had lived in one for thirteen damned years. But some possibilities shook her to the core when she thought about them. As if the TV understood her

darkest fear, the door of that broken house opened slowly, and suddenly, a large hairy arm shot out of the darkness and grabbed the boy. The girl started screaming, and the final cries of the boy faded into the background noise as the house swallowed him whole. Eleven couldn't take it anymore. She switched the TV off with a mental drive and crashed onto the ground in front of the couch. In the heat of the moment, she had forgotten that she had been standing on the sofa for the last few minutes. The fall didn't hurt that much, but she felt the pain inside her heart. She needed to know the fate of the couple. A moment later, still reeling from the shock, she switched the TV on and witnessed a tragic scene. The girl was sitting in front of the house and crying all by herself. Her friend had been devoured by the monstrosity that refused to take her, and now she couldn't do anything. The credits started rolling as Eleven jumped up from the floor and raced into her room.

An hour later, in the town of Hawkins, the bell of the Klein residence rang a few times.

"We have our first guests," Mrs. Klein spoke excitedly and almost ran to the door. Mr. Klein followed his wife with a heavy basket in his hand. He didn't mind, he loved his wife and also loved children. She opened the door and greeted the four kids standing at the porch.

A few minutes later, four dejected souls left the driveway with heavy hearts.

Dustin sniffed, "He's the Mayor, can't he at least buy some decent candies?"

"Oh come on. She makes amazing candies," Lucas objected meekly. He loved Mrs. Klein's candies, but he also expected some additional goodies.

"A nougat is all I ask for, is it..."

The other two kids didn't bother taking part in the debate. Mike was feeling depressed because Eleven didn't come. Of course, his brain had already warned his heart about the consequences of its foolish

fantasies. But the spirit was unstoppable at times. Beside him, Will was walking in a slow gait too. He was being hounded by a strange monstrous cloud that no one could see, and he was feeling pretty fucked up about that subject. He knew that no one would believe him, but...

A voice resounded in his mind, "I've seen many impossibilities turning into possibilities during that week. I believe..."

Mike believed in the impossibility. He was the one to have shielded Eleven against her unstoppable fate until the last moment. And even now, after nearly a year, he still believed that she would come back to him one day. Perhaps Mike would understand him?

Before Will could open his mouth, Mike suddenly stopped and grabbed his hand tightly. Will turned his gaze towards Mike's face and then shifted it towards where his eyes pointed. A small figure was standing on the road draped in a white cloth. It was the most hilarious costume that Will had ever seen in his entire life. The kid was dressed as a... *'Bedsheet ghost?'*

Mike was staring at the figure with absolute attention as if he was actually looking at a ghost. The figure was standing there too, completely transfixed as if it was staring at a real ghostbuster. A few moments later, a hand dropped in Mike's shoulder, and he was yanked out of his trance.

"What the hell are you two doing?" Dustin seemed frustrated.

"Yeah man, let's go. All the good stuff's gonna run out," Lucas supported him.

Mike stuttered for a second, "You... do you... that figure!"

"You okay Mike?" Will was tensed about this sudden shift in Mike's behavior.

"What? Oh, that kid?" Dustin spoke indifferently.

Mike shook his head to clear his mind and spoke with alarm, "She



looks familiar."

Lucas came forward and spoke earnestly, "Listen, Mike. You're losing it again. First of all, that's a boy. Girls don't dress like that. And second, IT'S NOT HER."

"But..."

Dustin voiced support to Lucas, "Come on Mike. He's correct. What are the chances that she won't run to you if she really comes back? Look at the kid. He's not even moving."

Mike shrugged, he didn't have an answer to the strange feelings that had sent a barrage of sparks into a cold furnace inside his heart. But he had to know. To the bewilderment of his friends, he took a hesitant step forward. The kid kept standing there like a statue. Was he shaking? Was that a real ghost?

The gang reached the figure after a few seconds, but the apparition didn't speak to them. Will traced the faint outline underneath the sheet and realized that the head was moving as if it was trying to ensure who they really were. Then it returned to Mike's face and froze.

Mike gently lifted an arm to remove the sheet, but Lucas stopped him, "Are you crazy? What if the kid's mom is here?"

Mike suddenly became aware of the stupidity of his action. He lowered his hand as a mild gust sent a ripple down the sheet.

"Umm... what... you..."

"For crying out loud!" Dustin lost his shit and almost yelled, "Listen, kid. What do you want?"

There was no reply. The eyes hidden by the shadow were focused entirely on Mike.

"Ah damn. A crazy one. Alright, let's go," Dustin literally dragged Mike away from the kid.

They moved a few meters ahead when Mike halted and freed himself from Dustin's clutches.

"What? Seriously?"

Mike turned around and ran back to the kid who was still standing at the exact same location.

He reached the kid and spoke gently, "You remind me of a friend."

The wind suddenly picked up and sent ripples through the sheet, but the frame didn't move.

"I brought something for her. But I guess she's not coming," Mike tried to laugh, but the lump in his throat obstructed him.

He sighed as he removed the shoulder straps of his ghostbuster backpack, lowered it to the ground and took out two objects. The first was a package containing two Eggos and the second, a chocolate bar in waffle flavor. Then he held them to the kid and smiled, "You can have them. I'll just believe that you're her."

Mike was struggling to hold the smile. The corners of his mouth kept trying to bend towards the bottom as he fought to hold back his tears, but the kid standing in front of him didn't need to witness his sorrow. So he held onto his resolve and continued, "It's not much. But she loved Eggos. So..."

Suddenly, the sheet moved. It slowly rose about a foot, and a small palm appeared beneath the drape. The light was sparse at this part of the street and Mike couldn't make out the shape clearly. On top of that, his vision was becoming blurred as tears fought to break through their prison. He gently placed the confectionary on the outstretched palm and smiled at the figure. Will was standing right beside him while the rest of the gang was holding their positions a few feet back. A moment later, they followed his lead as he walked away from the figure without turning back even once. It was a dream after all, but the longer he stayed there, the shorter its duration would be. He needed to leave that place as quickly as possible. The gang marched away, with one dejected and one confused soul at its head.

Just before taking the corner, Lucas noticed the two men who were standing beside a white unmarked van and casually observing their surroundings. He stiffened his shoulders as he faintly recalled a scene from one year back. But he let it go a moment later as he remembered that its been almost a year since that tragic night and the feds had never come after them since then. What he didn't notice was that a few minutes after they were gone from the location, the brakes of the vehicle failed, and it started rolling downhill. The two men ran after their van, cursing along the way as the van rammed through the barrier along the road and disappeared from the field of view completely.

Another thirty minutes passed, and the party secured a few big wins and made some strange discoveries along the way. The most bizarre was the appearance of that annoying girl named Max. Mike hated her from the guts because he was sure that she was scheming to take Eleven's place. He would be having none of it, but he was not in a mood to fight with Lucas and Dustin at that point either. There were two distinct groups in the party now. Dustin, Lucas, and Max formed the merry band while Mike and Will formed the grouchy gang. A few minutes later the two groups split, and Mike and Will sat down on a bench at the side of the street. Will was fumbling with his makeshift blaster and trying to make sense of something but wasn't confident enough to speak to Mike.

Mike noticed the agitation and smiled at his friend, "You want to tell me something?"

"It's nothing. But..."

"Will. You can tell me anything, I'm your friend," Mike encouraged him.

Will thought for a second and made up his mind. Then he spoke calmly, "Mike. What I'm about to tell you may be a simple coincidence. It can also be a mistake."

Mike felt confused at the words but nodded.

"The kid we just met had something written on his left arm."

*Somewhere far away, somewhere beyond the reaches of mortal man, a spark was born inside a cold forge.*

Mike couldn't speak. He swallowed and urged Will continue. Will stared at his eyes and spoke with resolve, "It said zero.... one... one... Mike?"

Mike was already running towards the location they had visited thirty minutes back. He shouted, "Not zero... one... one..."

Mike had told Will about Eleven but never described the true nature of her tattoo. Unlike other numbers, it had a zero transcribed before the two ones.

Will stood up and started running behind his friend as Mike laughed to the wind, "ELEVEN!"

They kept running through the street as fast as their little feet could carry them. After approximately five minutes of running, they reached the location but couldn't find anyone. It was empty, and the ghost was gone just like it was supposed to.

Mike shouted in the wind, "ELEVEN? EL?"

Will helped by checking the other direction. There weren't any replies. Mike kept repeating his question but the moment was gone. They couldn't find her.

Thirty minutes later they sat down on the curb as their stamina nearly ran out. Will cleared his throat and spoke, "I'm sorry Mike. I should've told you earlier."

Mike sighed but smiled at his soft-spoken friend.

"It's okay. At least she's alive. Now I know that she's out there..."

Will gently clutched Mike's hand and shouted enthusiastically, "WE WILL FIND HER."

"You lost your mommy?" a shrill voice rang behind them.

Mike and Will swallowed and slowly turned their heads around. A group of older boys was standing behind them and laughing like lunatics. The leader of the gang carried a brass knuckle on his right hand. Both Mike and Will knew that boy; Jeff was Troy's older brother and an impeccable rascal.

"Run!" Mike threw the word into the air and dashed towards the right as Will ran towards the left. After a few seconds of running, Mike turned his head to get a look behind. He was relieved to see that the entire gang was running after him. It meant that Will was saved. But it also indicated that Mike was utterly fucked. The last time he'd got hit by the brass knuckle it had hurt like hell, and he wasn't in a rush to refresh his memory.

Mike was a swift sprinter, but they were senior students. He could never beat them in the long run. But he believed in impossibility, so he kept racing. He dashed for another few minutes and felt like crashing onto the pavement but somehow kept moving. His throat was raw, and his mouth was parched. He wished for this to get over as fast as possible but his body protested; better damage the leg and injure the lungs to protect the rest. Mike took a corner and suddenly got whacked by a blow to the face. Then the lights went out inside his head and sealed his fate.

Sometime later Mike came to his senses, and his mind confirmed that he was out only for some time, but it felt like an eternity. A terrible headache was tearing away at his skull, and he had difficulty focusing his eyes. Then after another few moments, he found himself tied to a broken chair in a run-down shack somewhere in Hawkins. Or he hoped it was.

He discovered the entire gang sitting around him, comfortably going through some slut mags and drinking beer. Jeff noticed him and called out, "Ho ho ho. The prince is up, rise and shine."

Mike was studying the brass knuckles with rapt concentration. It glimmered under the faint light that radiated from the lamp hanging on the ceiling. Jeff slowly put his fingers through the holes and formed a fist, the polished alloy creating a menacing weapon that guaranteed pain.

Mike felt a knot in his stomach. Was Hawkins full of psychopaths? Would one day Indiana lead the country in the number of serial killings? First, there was Troy, a high school kid who carried a knife with him and had nearly killed him last year. Now his brother, Jeff was about to beat the shit out of a fourteen-year-old kid with brass knuckles that hurt worse than anything he had faced in his life.

Jeff came to him in a slow and steady pace and stood beside the chair. There were no long talks, no heroic speeches, no begging, and no crying. This was real life, and everything moved fast. Jeff cleared his throat and spoke calmly, "End of the line kid. It's time to pay the price."

But then he made a strange face as he tapped Mike's forehead with the knuckles. Then he spoke in a sincere voice, "It doesn't have to be so bad. You can still walk away."

Mike felt puzzled but nodded. Whatever this psycho was thinking couldn't be worse than what Mike was expecting a moment ago. Jeff crouched in front of him and asked calmly, "Where is that girl who broke my brother's arm?"

Mike felt a fuse going off inside his head. He gritted his teeth and spoke with conviction, "I'll never tell you."

"Oh, so you do know. You lied to me last time, boy," Jeff sounded angry.

He rapped the knuckle on Mike's head with a bit more force this

time. It was a light blow that knocked the breath straight out of him. He almost screamed in pain but somehow held onto his voice. These punks were no match for Eleven but what if she didn't have her powers anymore? Comic books always talked about heroes who had burnt through their abilities during their final acts of valor. And Mike had the proof right in the front of his eyes. Eleven was alive but never tried contacting him through the radio. So, either she had utterly forgotten Mike or she had lost her powers. A goddess without her endowments would not be able to fight the monster standing in front of him. So, Mike struggled against his instincts to swallow the pain that was trying its best to make him scream for help.

Jeff sighed and spoke, "You're making this difficult kid. I just want to talk to her."

"I WILL NOT TELL YO..."

Jeff viciously backhanded Mike before he could finish the sentence. Mike gave a muffled cry as tears started flowing down his cheek. All that talk about resolve was real, but he was a kid after all. He tasted blood on his split lips, but he would still not tell them about Eleven. Jeff pulled back his arm and leveled it at Mike's abdomen, then he drove it forward in a practiced motion. Mike closed his eyes and waited for the pain to reach him and make him pass out.

But it never came. A second passed, then another, then another, still nothing. Mike opened his eyes and observed Jeff standing in front of him with his jaw hanging wide open. His eyeballs were trying their best to close the shutter. Jeff closed and opened his eyes a few times as if trying to guess whether he was awake or dreaming. Mike looked down and almost lost his shit.

Jeff's arm was hovering inches away from Mike's abdomen like a statue made of stone. It was unnaturally immobile for a human hand, and by the look of things, Jeff had nothing to do with this magic. With a shocking realization, Mike realized that something had just gone terribly wrong as the metallic door of the shack was suddenly yanked out by a tremendous force from the outside. Then it disappeared into the night leaving in its place a hollow door frame through which fog started spilling into the room.

A second later, a small figure wearing a white drape slowly walked inside, leaving in its wake swirling fog that gave away to the wind. The figure moved inside the room and turned its face towards Mike. Through the small openings in the drape, Mike finally saw the eyes as they reflected the light coming from the halogen on the ceiling. They burnt with a fury to which even Jeff's murderous intent couldn't hold a candle. This wasn't the situation in which Mike wanted to meet Eleven but she was here at last, and he was delighted. But a moment later he imagined the scene from Eleven's perspective.

First of all, Mike was tied to a chair, apparently intended for torture. Second, Mike was bleeding from his lips, the result of the act undoubtedly committed by the tall boy standing in front of him.

*'Eleven has just walked into a stage where her friend is being tortured. SHIT!'*

Jeff finally freed his hand from the invisible hold, turned around and shouted at the strange apparition, "The fuck? Who the fuck are you?"

"DON'T KILL HIM!" Mike shouted.

The occupants in the room turned their face towards Mike in shock. Before they could react, the figure raised its arm, and all hell broke loose.

With a series of cracks, every finger in Jeff's right hand snapped like toothpicks. It was the same hand that held the brass knuckle, and now he would never be able to take it off without surgical intervention. Before he could howl in pain, a metal bucket flew from the corner of the room, hit him straight on the face and knocked him out cold. The two members of Jeff's gang made a dash towards the exit but couldn't reach it. With a shriek, they flew up and crashed through the ceiling and drifted outside. One of the guys desperately grabbed the lamp on his way out, and the room was plunged into darkness.



Mike held his breath for the chaos to get over and kept praying that Eleven did not kill anyone. The lamp was gone, but slivers of moonlight sliced through the swirling fog entering the room from the twin holes on the roof. Mike squinted his eyes but could not find the white figure in the sparse moonlight. Eleven had disappeared just like the ghost she was dressed as.

Mike thought about a lost traveler who had just discovered an ocean at the edge of a desert. It wasn't a mirage, it was genuine. But the water was salty and not suitable for drinking. He still needed to find the oasis. First though, Mike slowly counted the brighter side of things. Eleven was alive and doing well. She had undoubtedly gotten stronger and still cared for him. He breathed a sigh of relief and wiped his tears with his arms. Then he froze midway as realization dawned on him. His arms were tied behind him a few moments ago, but now they were free. Mike swallowed and stood up from the chair. Then he gritted his teeth and turned around.

His heart stopped as he found the ghost standing right behind his chair. A smooth wind blew ripples on the white drape as Mike walked towards the apparition, shaking all the way. He reached and stood next to the figure and spoke in a shaking voice, "El?"

Then he held his breath and awaited a reply. A moment later, the figure raised its arm and pressed its soft fingers against Mike's lips.

*Somewhere in the realm of emotions, a forge roared to life as the lone spark ignited the fuel that had been imprisoned for so long.*

Mike inhaled sharply and then started laughing in relief, it was Eleven after all. A lifetime ago, while walking beside him on the rail tracks, she had made the exact same gesture after seeing the wound on his chin. No matter where they were, or what time it was, Eleven could never withstand any harm to Mike.

The apparition responded in a sweet voice, "Mike?"

Mike realized that it was a question, and he provided the answer by wrapping his arms tightly around the figure. No, Mike had not forgotten her, he still loved her as much as he did back then. In reply, Eleven wrapped her hands around Mike and started crying in relief. It was a dream both of them had waited for so long to come true, and at last, it had become a reality. They need not speak any words, their bond was beyond the simple construct of human language.

A few minutes later they parted, and Mike slowly lifted the veil and stared in amazement at the girl who had stolen his heart a lifetime ago. Eleven looked absolutely gorgeous in the soft moonlight. Mike had imagined night after night about how she would look like when she came back to him. But Eleven had exceeded all expectations. In place of the buzzcut, she had a headful of poofy hair that unevenly covered part of her forehead. Beneath it was a smiling face flanked on both sides by a pair of pointy ears. Eleven had changed in the last year; she appeared more mature, calmer and more determined now. But her eyes were still the same; a pair of dark pools filled with compassion, hope, and love. Another thing didn't change; her weird nosebleed. It was El after all. She grinned at him when their eyes met, but Mike couldn't respond. To put it simply, Eleven had taken his breath away and had left him at a complete loss for words. So, he did the only thing he could do under the circumstances.

Mike leaned forward and gently kissed his pretty ghost.